Journal

The English Ivy plant on my kitchen window sill was a gift from a special relative. In watching it's progress each day while working in the kitchen, I now appreciate the joy and satisfaction people find in tending plants and flowers. I have watched it grow from three leaves to stretch all the way across my window sill. Each new leaf is infinitely tiny and grows a little bigger each day. All the leaves are unique - different sizes and shapes and different ways of twisting away from the vine. All are delicate and graceful. Like members of a family, each leaf is individually special and each serves to make the plant more beautiful.

Journal

I was in a Veteran's Hospital this week for the first time in my life and saw many very old, very lonely, very sick men. My two teddler sons waited with me in the cafeteria while my husband went to another floor of the hospital to visit an uncle of his. It was Sunday afternoon, and a lot of the men had visitors and were sitting at tables drinking coffee or soft drinks. Some men were alone or visiting with each other, and I saw lonliness and desparation in many faces. As I chased my smaller son around, one smiling elderly man came over and chatted with us. He seemed to be all grey - his pajamas and bathrobe were grey striped; his greay hair grew shaggy around his ears; his face was drawn with the grey paler sickness brings. His fingernails were so long and brown; he probably had neither the strength nor ambition to clip them. But his eyes sparkled with an unfailing sense of humor. He smiled and joked about my son's green beret. I explained that we had just come from the St. Patrick's Day parade in South Boston. His eyes had a faraway look as he recalled the last time he'd been to "Southie", years and years before with his father. He chuckled, apparently remembering a funny incident that had taken place that day. My husband returned then, and the man slipped quietly away without finishing our conversation. He sat in a seat by a window, apparently feeling he might be imposing on us. We did get to talk with him again before we left. My husband had some bread and brownies he had taken to his uncle who was unable to eat them, so he passed them around in the cafeteria and my new

friend accepted a few. My little one-year old son proceeded to scrounge bits of brownies from him, and he gave him little pieces at a time, finally picking him up and holding him on his lap. He told my husband he'd been in the hospital six months, was convinced nothing was wrong with him, and was sure he'd be out soon.

Others around the room looked less cheerful than this optimistic man. I had smiled at one lost looking soul as I chased my son around. He looked back at me but did not smile; he seemed confused and suspicious, not knowing how to return a friendly greeting. Many men were in wheelchairs and some were amputees.

How lonely it must be to grow old, to become sick, to be in a hospital without the comfort of family nor friends. Some of these men have no company at all; they lie in their beds day after day and no one comes to see them. Yet they surely all had family and friends at one time as we all do now. Many of them have probably outlived their loved ones, or their loved ones are themselves too sick or too far away to visit them. It seemed less sad when I realized there was much kinship between patients. Some played cards, some sat and chatted, one patient wheeled another down the hall. I was glad to see this comradship existed, for we all have a need for contact with our fellowman. Otherwise the human spirit will die from loneliness.

Journal

Today's economic and business structure necessitates a completely different way of living from twenty-five to fifty years ago. In our great-grandparents day, the family usually lived and worked in the same community. Children grew up, went to school and worked at jobs in their home town and married and settled in their home town. Children were near their parents, as comfort and company in their parents' advancing years, able to assist them with their needs. Children could benefit from their parents and grandparents' maturity and experience. Everyone pitched in and helped each other in times of sickness, financial difficulty, or emotional problems. There was a sense of permanence. It was a comfort and joy to have loved ones close by.

Unfortunately, many families do not benefit from this closeness today. A tendency toward suburbia has changed our lives. Overcrowed cities necessitated some people moving to smaller surrounding towns and commuting to work. The emphasis placed on college education has also changed our lives. Children go to college, often in different states far from home. They graduate and seldom return home. Some are forced to work in different areas where the best job opportunities are available. Some girls marry boys they met at school and settle where their husbands lived. People are more transient, moving where better opportunities exist. Hence many people are far from any member of their family and miss the closeness and sharing of problems provided in a close family relationship. Many lonely elderly people do not have any of their children close by for the daily

communication they crave. New mothers, home for the first time with their new responsibilities, yearn for the reassuring presence of mother or sisters. When sickness sweeps through a house incapacitating everyone, the family are not close enough to lend supportive assistance. A sense of futility occurs with the realization that it is often physically impossible to offer needed assistance to other members of our family. We are missing the comfort, support, and assistance that the extended family afforded. Because of this void in our lives, we are a little more lonely and a little less confident in our ability to cope with life's problems.

Journal

THE COMMON COLD

There is nothing so irritating as the common cold. It can cause more discomfort than a broken leg but evokes less sympathy than a broken fingernail. The symptoms are fairly consistent with each benefactor, but vary in intensity. A cold produces headache, scratchy throat, runny nose and eyes, congestion, sinus problems, coughing and aching of muscles. There is loss of sleep because of breathing difficulties and loss of energy because of fatigue and discomfort. There is the sore red nose, the result of never ending blowing, and there are the sore stomache musles, the result of uncontrollable coughing spells. No matter how many cold tablets are taken or how much cough medicine is consumed, little relieves the unpleasant effects a cold produces. It is a paradox that science understands the least about the commonest of illnesses.

Journal

BARBARA WALTERS

Barbara Walters, hostess of the Today Show, is a successful newswoman and a credit to her sex. She worked very hard to achieve the position she now has and struggled to achieve success during years in which Women's Liberation was not yet heard of. She is very well informed of her subject matter, direct in her interviewing, and genuinely interested in her guests' opinions. Although sometimes she appears a little blunt in her frankness when asking questions, she doesn't seem to wish to embarrass her guests by her directness. Rather, she is asking the questions she honestly feels her audience is asking. She appears to be indestructable and sometimes insensitive. This image was dispelled one day as I watched her on the Today Show. Tears streamed down her cheeks as she was touched by the remarks of the gentle old man she was interviewing. It was obvious that her sensitivity and womanliness added warmth to the interview. She has the knowledge and enthusiasm that make a good newswoman. Barbara Walters is a fine example for aspiring newswoman.

Journal

SNOW

A walk in the aftermath of one of winter's snow storms is peaceful, serene and beautiful. Snow covers all and paints each object it touches in white majestic beauty. Limbs of trees, heavily laden with snow, droop in silent surrender to nature's wishes. The wagon in the back year, the bird feeder by the fence, the trash barrel at the side door -- all are transformed into beautifully mysterious creatures. The virgin snow covers all the dirt and clutter and lends grace and dignity to all it touches. For a time everything is pure again. It is as if no one had ever walked the streets nor breathed the air. It is like a new beginning - pure, clear and untouched. Snow is indeed a beautiful gift of nature.

Journal

BRIAN

Our son, Brian, two and a half years of independence, delight and curiosity, is a continual joy to us. Because he is our first born, we have savored each new experience in his development, enjoying it to the fullest. We have watched him grow from the round gurgling infant to the chubby smiling one-year old, and now we are discovering he is becoming an independent little boy. He is already stretching out and acquiring the little boy slimness and leaving the babyhood roundness behind. His big blue eyes are always curious and nothing escapes his darting glance. He sees the sugar and butter simutaneously and grabs them with each chubby hand. My casual housecleaning habits had to be reformed in certain critical areas. Unless the kitchen countertops and table are kept clear of clutter, they are a source of entertainment for our little climber. He is not fussy -- a potato, carrot peelings, or a cake mix are all fun to play with. The constant motion he maintains is a cource of amazement to us. Running back and forth from room to room, he is a cowboy. Marching with wooden spoon over his shoulder, he is in a parade. Leaping off the couch onto his belly on the floor, he is a swimmer. He is becoming independent and strong willed now, knows what he does and does not want, and it is sometimes a battle of wills between parents and child. We like to pretend we win some of the time. "No" is the constant reply we receive, even to things he really wants. It's his personal declaration of independence. Kisses, given freely and spontaneously before, are now bargained for.

We have to promise a piggy back, a ride in the car or a cookie to receive this display of affection.

In watching our Brian now, we sometimes have difficulty recalling the way he looked and acted as a baby -- those cherished moments we thought we'd never forget. Photographs help recall the happiest of babies -- sociable, forever smiling, constantly pointing to identify each new discovery. But the baby seems to be somewhere in Brian, an eternal part of the growing little boy.

He is a beautiful little boy, a carbon copy of his father. His hands are beautiful. Miniature copies of his grandfather's, they are big and strong, each finger wide, but still bearing the chubbiness of childhood. His wavy blond hair frames a round face with a light, often rosy complexion. A few freckles are scattered on his turned up nose, and thick long lashes frame his beautiful blue eyes.

He is growing up and becoming a little friend, a lot of fun to be with. Shopping trips and visits to friends' homes were formerly chaotic and exhausting trying to control the curious, running baby. Now he is a companion, staying with us, asking questions, pointing out each familiar item -- the apple jacks he saw on Captain Kangaroo, the Mickey Mouse ball from his favorite Disney cartoon, the "stop" sign and signal lights he has learned to identify from Sesame Street. We are delighted watching his mind develop and are amazed at the detail his memory stores up. If there is a promise of a new book or a special treat made at nap time, he greets us with the request as soon as he awakens. He can always tell me where he's left a favorite toy or book when he's beseeching me to "go upstairs, get toy Mom?"

We are enjoying him so much now because he is all ours, and he will never belong so completely to us as he does these first few years of his life. We will help him grow; and when it is time, we will let him go. Our efforts are rewarded with the joy we receive from the delightful experiences his new life has brought to our home.

Journal

TIMOTHY

Timothy, our little affectionate pixie, is one and a half years of dynamic energy. He is our second child, born a year after his brother, Brian. When we first found out we would be having a second child, we wondered if we'd ever give him the attention and love we gave our first born. We were secretly afraid we could never love a child as much as our first. But our fears were dispelled as he slowly worked his way into our hearts where a special place had been reserved for him alone. He is a little character. His pint sized compact body pleds around the house resembling a penguin waddling on unsure ice. His light brown hair is straight and sticks out everywhere, seemingly always filled with static electricity. His little pixie face is adorable. His china blue eyes twinkle constantly under pronounced arched eyebrows. He peers at you as if constantly asking a question. His little nose crinkles up when he smiles and cries and one solitary dimple keeps appearing on his right upper cheek. His tongue is always sticking out as if it helps him to concentrate. He screeches in excitement when he hears a doggie bark or sees a bird fly, and he claps his hands in glee when he watches the puppets on television. His affectionate nature delights us. He cuddles anything he can find - a teddy bear, a soft diaper, or a blanket, all the while sucking his thumb and paddling around the house. He squeezes next to me on the couch or in bed when he's not feeling well. He climbs up on me as if

he was climbing a tree, puts his arms around my neck in a tight hug and gives me a noiseless kiss. He is an imp. He will climb on anything. In two minutes when my back is turned, he is up on the chair and onto the kitchen table. Already he is able to climb into the highchair. We're never sure what he'll try next. He is constantly pestering his brother whom he idolizes. He breaks down Brian's stack of blocks, pulls his hair,and grabs Brian's favorite toys from him and runs away squealing hysterically. But he loves Brian and he loves his Mom and Dad. He is happy to be alive and a part of our family and misses us when we even leave the room. He loves having everyone around, and we love having him around. Our Timmy is a special addition to our family.

Journal

THE FUTILITY OF THE TODDLER STAGE

I sat on the living room couch watching Sesame Street with my two toddler sons, Brian, 2½ years, and Timmy, 1½ years. While I knew that child guidance instructors encourage parents to share and participate in children's learning experiences by watching television with them, I knew my motives in sitting there with them were not this constructive. Why was I sitting there on the couch when I could be getting things done at a time when their attention was taken up? Dishes had to be picked up; my husband needed shirts and pants ironed for work for the week; the kitchen floor was cluttered with crumbs from toast and cereal. Rising to the challenge of my messy house, I left Big Bird and Friends and set up the iron and board in the kitchen Four minutes later, Timmy pitter pattered away from T.V. to see what good things he was missing in the kitchen. He pulled on the cord of the iron, tugged at the legs of the board, and threw all the clothes to be ironed on the floor. I had one shirt sleeve ironed before I retired from that project. The mental picture of the hot iron on Timmy's head was too threatening. I get out the broom to sweep away the remains of breakfast. Instantly Brian wanted to "help Mommy." He had to have his broom and Timmy decided he wanted mine. Both swept away the pile I had accumulated and tracked it in with them to the other rooms. Then they both fought over dustpan privileges while I sat on the chair trying to plan my next brilliant move. The dishwasher had dishes to be put away from the night before. At the sound of the click when the washer was opened, both ran out. "What doin' Mom?" Brian inquired. Timmy climbed up on the open door and

investigated the soap dispenser while Brian offered assistance by grabbing at steak knives. Pulling Timmy onto the floor with one hand and retrieving treatening knives from Brian with the other, I slammed the door to the dishwasher. Both scurried to close the handle, one of their favorite jobs. Feeling a sense of futility, I sighed and headed to the living room to see what Big Bird was up to.

Blessed Are The Sick

She sits in her recliner in the small room at the nursing home. She has been there now for a year and two months. She was transferred there from a five-week hospital stay where she had been admitted for severe bronchitis, which was related to her advanced emphysema condition. She almost died in the hospital. While there, she suffered a stroke which left her left arm and leg partially paralyzed. She was not expected to live long as her lungs are practically non-functioning.

My mother is 77 years old. She is mentally sharper than most of the people in the home. In a way, this is more difficult. It is depressing to look at the poor people around her. Many of them wander around aimlessly, muttering and rambling about anything and everything, confused and lost. It is hard for her to look at them and think that perhaps her mind, too, will go. There are some residents, though, who, like my mother, have physical handicaps which necessitate their being cared for in a nursing home. We all hate seeing her there. As one of my friends said to me, it's like this is the last step - they're just waiting to die.

My mother cannot walk. For awhile, with therapy and a brace to support her leg she was able to walk with assistance, at least to the bathroom. But her lungs were not strong enough to keep up the therapy, so she doesn't take steps anymore. She has to be on oxygen all the time, and the sound of the oxygen machine she uses irritates her; the nose device is also a source of minor annoyance. To go anywhere in her wheelchair, even for a walk around the hall, she must be equipped with portable oxygen.

Now she has almost totally lost her eyesight. She has a condition called macular degeneration, an irreversible untreatable condition. She will probably never go completely blind, but she cannot read anymore. Reading was her world; she loved it. She would read one book after another. But now that lovely escape is not an option for her. She tries to struggle through large print books, but it's pretty hopeless. The"Talking Books" machine has not worked out either. A book by Father Andrew Greely sits on her bedside table. She loved Andrew Greely's books and read and reread them several times. But this book she's not been able to read, and it's there almost hauntingly reminding her that one more pleasure is lost to her.

And - the most devasting thing she has had to cope with during her own illness was the illness and death of her only son, Jack, my little brother, who died of AIDS four months ago, at age thirty-six. She was crazy about him. A beautiful picture of him and his best friend, Randa, taken shortly before he died, has been turned toward the wall because she cannot bear to think of him yet.

I know other people have gone through even more suffering than my mother and for longer periods of time, but it is still not easy. It must be devasting for her.

She has some stock which my father had bought years ago. Over the years, she has watched it carefully. It was a game to her. It's not a great amount, about $7,000, I guess, but she still can find the stock page on a "good eyesight" day and search for her Gulf & Wester stock. She asks whoever is visiting to read her the "going rate,"

My fear now is that soon the stock will have to be sold to pay for her care. Her savings are almost gone and she is not allowed to keep any assets before applying for Medicare. I hope my mother will not have to know if this stock has to be sold. It's one thing she still looks forward to doing, checking her paper with someone each day. She never had much money but took great pride in managing her money, paying her bills on time. The only savings she ever had were realized from the sale of our home some years ago. She carefully put the profits from the sale into four certificates in each of her children's names and hoped that we could use this money in the event she didn't need it for her own livlihood. Of course, that money is almost all gone now for nursing care. She is not aware of how much is gone yet.

We all visit as much as possible, but I'm sure it's not compensation for her loss of independence in her own apartment. It doesn't fill up the hours. The nurses and aids are good to her; they all like her and have become friends to her. We thank God, or goodness, for that because there are not many residents who can be good company for her. The nurses urge her to sit in her wheelchair by their nurses' station with some of the other residents who are confined to chairs. She does this sometimes, but it really can be more depressing than staying in her room alone because most of these people are moaning about something and are not coherent. She does make the effort, and for all that's going on, really has not complained much. We're proud of her.

My mother cannot walk, can breathe only with oxygen support, and can hardly see. She has to be dressed and undressed, taken out of bed and put into bed and cannot go to the bathroom alone. She depends on others for almost everything.

I love my mother, but I hope God takes her before she loses anything else. I hope there's a heaven. If there is, she'll get in. She's paid her dues.

Kitty Lenehan Roust

January 25, 1988